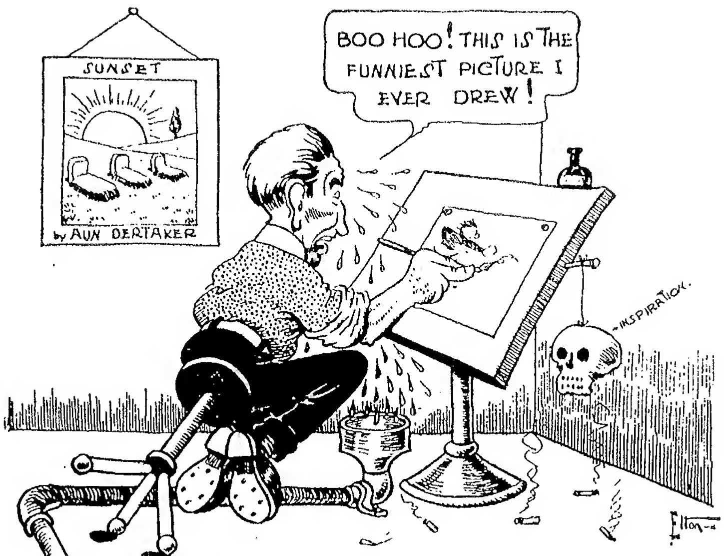


No branch of motion pictures has made more rapid advances than the animated cartoon. This story, telling all about the St. Vitusy little fellows, has been written for PHOTOPLAY by the world's foremost animated cartoonist. Mr. Bray, who holds most of the basic "animation" patents, is to moving comics what the Wrights were to pioneer aviation.

How the Comics Caper

COL. HEEZALIAR'S FATHER GIVES AWAY HIS WHOLE WAR-RECORD

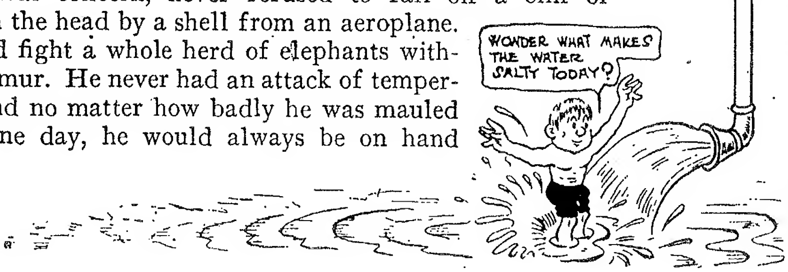
CARTOONS BY THE BRAY STUDIOS

By J. R. Bray

THERE seems to be nothing else so funny to the average observer as exaggerated suffering. That is the secret of the animated cartoon, just exactly as it is the secret of a Charlie Chaplin or Keystone comedy. Beyond that one point, it is all technique. And consequently the moving picture cartoon can be made funnier than the comedy played by human beings, because the possibilities of exaggeration are unlimited. Even the doughty Roscoe Arbuckle might hesitate before permitting a ferocious lion to creep up behind him and chew off his coat-tails, but such eminent players as my star actor, Col. Heeza Liar, do these things without protest.

This is as good a place as any to tell a few of the joys of making animated cartoons. First of all, I never have had the least difficulty with any of my actors over salaries. From the first day Col. Heeza entered my employ our relations were entirely amicable. He never threatened to "jump" to any rival concern, never refused to fall off a cliff or be shot in the head by a shell from an aeroplane. He would fight a whole herd of elephants without a murmur. He never had an attack of temperament, and no matter how badly he was mauled around one day, he would always be on hand the next, usually more ready for work than I was to work him. He did not demand the bridal suite at the Waldorf, nor refuse to show up at the studio unless a limousine was sent for him.

When I read of the troubles some directors have with their stars, I am very thankful that mine are of the docile variety. In fact, my only objection to them is quite the opposite — they are harder on me than I can be on them. When the bell in the Metropolitan



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tower rings five o'clock, and the mere photographic director allows it is time to quit for the day, my hero probably has a dozen savages aiming spears at tender parts of his physiology, and when I make a motion like a man looking for his hat and cane, he glances up at me and says:

"Are you going to leave me in this predicament all night? I put it to you as a gentleman and a scholar—how much sleep do you think I'm going to get? Honest, boss, I didn't think you'd do it!"

After that there is nothing for it but to get down to work again, and draw a few more thousand pictures to complete the reel and get my hero safely put away for the evening. Perhaps you can't quite see the moving picture director in the role of the tender-hearted sympathizer with the hired help. But you must remember that my actors, as well as being my employes, are my children.

There have been a number of explanations of the origin of moving picture cartoons, but none of them has just touched the spot. A few years ago I was making a living drawing one cartoon at a time for the news and comic papers. One day it dawned upon me that if I could make one living by drawing one cartoon at a time, I could make a lot of livings by drawing a lot of cartoons at a time. Of course, there would be no way in which I could market several thousand cartoons all exactly alike, so I decided to make each one just a little different from the others. That's all there is to it. Instead of turning out half a dozen sketches a week, I am now, with the assistance of about a score of artists, turning out about four thousand. I believe "struggling" newspaper artist is a correct description of my former estate—when an artist works for newspapers he is always described as "struggling." About the only thing I ever had to struggle over was stringing one job along so that it would occupy the whole day, and make the boss think I was overworked.

I am still struggling, but in a different way. Look at these figures:

In each foot of moving picture film there are about sixteen pictures, or sixteen thousand separate pictures to the thousand-foot reel. A one-reel cartoon contains, therefore, sixteen thousand sketches. A "struggling" newspaper artist, making one of those comic strips that are so popular on the sporting pages, draws five pictures a day. Therefore it would take him, at that rate, three thousand two hundred days, or one hundred and six months, or nearly nine years to finish one reel of animated cartoons. In my studio we turn out not less than one a week. Allowing that there are twenty of us at work, it makes nearly six months work each to be done in one week. If this isn't "struggling," what do you call it?

Old Mrs. Necessity, as is well known to all who have read the Book of Proverbs, is the mother of John W. Invention. To hire enough artists to draw thirty-two thousand pictures in a week would have upset the original plan which, as I have mentioned, was to make several livings all at one time. There was no object in carrying out the idea if these livings had to be divided among so many people that there would be only two or three left for myself. Incidentally, anyone who has had anything to do with artists knows that it would be a pretty difficult matter to get the several hundred sketchers together on the idea. You can lead the artist to the bristol-board but you cannot always make him work your way. Here is where the little joker pops out of the deck.

First of all, the cartoons are not all different. You may think they are, as you see them unwind on the sheet, but they aren't. For instance suppose my hero is chased into a cyclone cellar by a Zeppelin. He waits a second or two and pops out, but sees the Zep. still hovering. When he pops back again he goes through the same motion as he did when he popped in the first time, and so we can simply use the other sketch. He may pop in and out half a dozen times, and we fool you into thinking we have made a hundred or more different cartoons, when we have made, perhaps, not more than a dozen or two. So the struggle is not entirely physical, but is often in the line of the old problem, the control of mind over matter.

Here's another thing you may or may not have noticed: that when the cartoons are different, as to the action, this difference is usually not extended beyond the movements of one or two of the principal figures. Supposing I am making a cartoon of a lion chasing a hunter around a tree—the tree does not change. That tree may appear in the story to the extent of a

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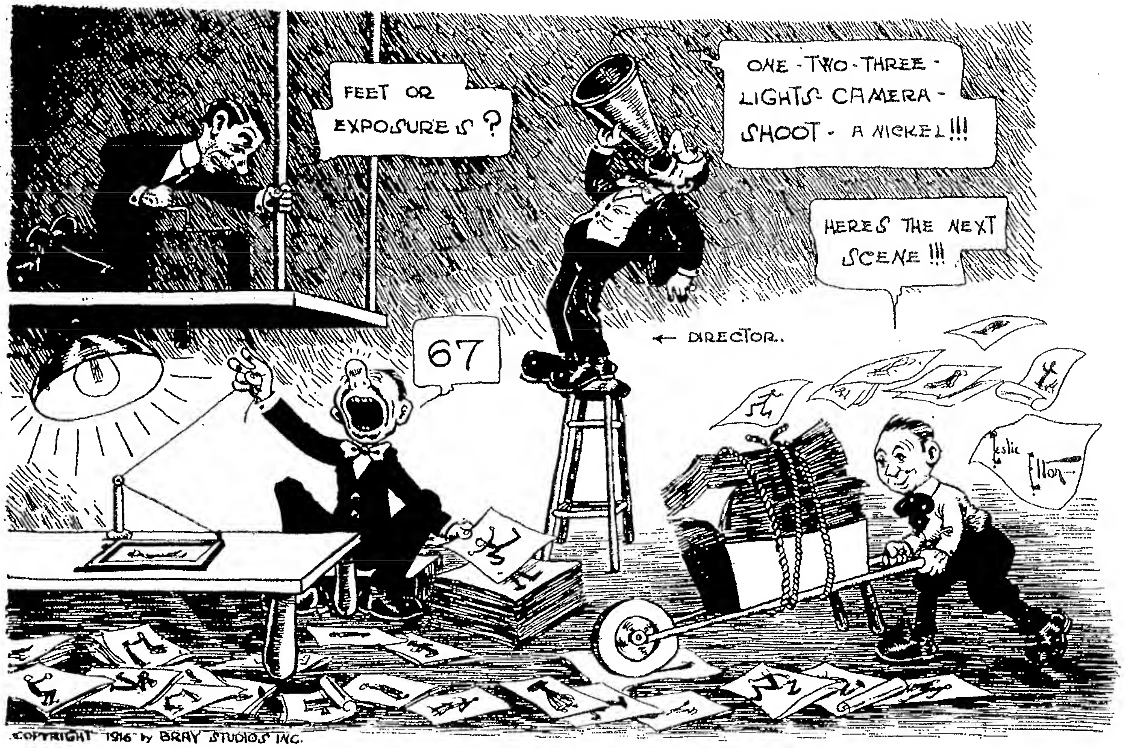

A climactic moment in the filming of a Bray thriller. Notice the drawn look on the face of the cameraman.

thousand or more of the individual pictures, but don't imagine for an instant that we draw a thousand trees. Nope. Just the same old tree put into place by what you might call a rubber-stamp method. If we want to make the tree rustle in the breeze, it takes perhaps a dozen sketches to produce the effect, but once these are done the rustling is easily accomplished by repeating these dozen over and over again in the same sequence. I am violating no confidence in telling this, for it is the only thing that makes the animated cartoon commercially possible.

Seriously, I do not believe there is any work in which as extensive results are obtained with such economy of action. Two sketches will give an effect of the briny deep scintillating under the brilliant summer sun, and a thorough-going murder can be accomplished in the most harrowing manner with less than a hundred.

Of course we seldom have murders in the cartoons, and thus far we have been able to escape the censorship in all states. The problem play has not yet reached the high point of development where it appeals to the film cartoonist, so we remain pure. There are times when we have been accused of misleading the minds of the young by showing scenes which were unreal. I believe, however, that this is a point in our favor. Suppose the young mind is taken by its owner to consider the "Adventures of Algy" in seventy-five harrowing episodes, in each one of which the least thrilling escapade from which Algy emerges in possession of all his limbs is something like dropping from the hundredth floor of a skyscraper into a pit of boiling oil. Is there not a grave danger that the possessor of the said young mind, imbued with intense admiration for the noble Algy, may seek to emulate his example, and go diving off skyscrapers, thus mussing up the sidewalks and the pedestrians? On the other hand—consider the animated cartoon. If my hero has any such adventure as pulling the tail of a lion through the bunghole of a barrel, and tying a knot in it so that the lion cannot escape, do you think there is any danger of the young mind aforesaid being influenced to follow the hero's example? Hardly. Lions are too scarce and valuable, and their owners refuse to permit young minds to trifle with them, tease them or feed them, much less tie knots in their tails. Thus the feats the cartoon heroes perform are so unique that, while the young mind may admire their

courage and prowess, circumstances prevent them from risking their young lives in doing likewise.

Aside from these sociological aspects of the cartoons, however, it may be of interest to describe briefly the process. The first problem is that of making the movements of the figures as steady and continuous as possible. It is out of the question to draw a series of pictures of a walking man in which the movement will be as smooth as the moving picture photographs of a similar action, but this can be approximated by exercising great care. The use of tracing paper is the solution. The artist places a piece of paper upon the last drawing made, so the position last taken shows clearly, and thus he is able to make the next picture with just the sufficient variation. It is all mathematical, once the idea is planned. There is no inspiration or temperament about working in the details. We have these things figured down to millimeters.

So first of all I write a scenario of the cartoon and draw six to a dozen sketches of the vital points of the story—the climaxes, so to speak. Then my assistants set to work on the multiplication. But my work does not end with those original dozen drawings. Whenever there is a new action introduced, I make the sketch providing all the essentials and leave only the detail work to the staff. These drawings are then arranged in order and numbered, and all is ready for the camera.

One of the most important details then is controlling the speed of the action. This is done by varying the number of photographs of each cartoon sketch. If the scene demands that the object shall move rapidly, then slowly, then come to a stop for a moment, the pictures representing the swift action would be given one exposure each. As the tempo slows down each picture is given a correspondingly increased number of exposures. When the figure stops moving, numerous photographs are made of the same sketch, according to the time the action is suspended. As I have said, there is no guess-work about it. It is all absolutely mathematical, and we never have to make "retakes" because an actor forgot and ran when he should have walked.

The one thing about this business which is not mathematical is putting the laughs into the cartoon. This is a serious matter. There is nothing so serious as producing humor. Did you ever see a comic artist or a writer of jokes who was not grave in demeanor, weighted down prematurely with woe and worry? The sadder a man the funnier his work, because if a thing looks funny to him it must be a scream to others. I think my present occupation as humorist to several million people weekly is due to the fact that my first experiences as an artist were so gloomy. I began life in Detroit, Michigan—no, that is not the gloomy fact to which I refer! Detroit is a lovely place, but the Detroit morgue is not especially cheerful, and the paper which employed me assigned me to the task of visiting that institution and making sketches of unidentified dead persons, victims of accidents, suicides, and such. If anyone who reads these observations has an ambition to become a humorist, I would heartily recommend him to get a job as official sketch artist in a morgue. In this way he will pile up a sufficient store of gloom to enable him to go through life as a humorist without any necessity for renewing the supply of the stuff that makes the comics comic.